

Markwood Gum

by Nancy Dykoff and Brian Davis

"I started to work in the timber industry when I was fourteen years old. That was in 1913, and I went to work for the Deer Creek Lumber Company.

"The Stepzinger's were the owners of the company, Elmer and Clyde. They were from Pennsylvania.

"I started driving team for them. That was all I ever done for them. I didn't do any cuttin' timber for them or anything like that. The Stepzingers contracted most of the cuttin' of the timber. They hardly ever cut any themselves; that is, the company did. They had six teams when I went to work.

"I was very small when I went to work for them. The boss took me to the barn and showed me the team. I had to get a box so I could put the harness on, but I got along all right. I knew how to put the harness on because we always had a smaller horse at home. They was the same kind of harness too.

"That winter the snow was about a foot deep when I went to work. They was skidding timber uphill with a block and chains. They couldn't get the railroad into the side of the mountain, so they skid the timber up and down the other side where the train track was. That was mostly



Captain Markwood Gum

We met Markwood Gum and learned of life in the lumber camps. After going to work at the lumber camps at the age of fourteen, he stayed there until 1918 when he went to Cass to work in the lumber mill until his retirement.

all I done that winter. It was a lot of work, but you take the snow on and it would skid along pretty lively. Of course, some of it was terrible and large timber. So much of it was chestnut trees back in that time; why, I couldn't see over the center of the logs. They called Big Ridge where we was skidding. It was mostly all hardwood. It was virgin forest then, it had never been cut before. I worked for them until 1918, the fall of 1918.

"I left there and went up to North Fork. I didn't stay there long though; that was too rough a country. The boss, Charlie Rossburg, I worked for at the sawmill up at North Fork was a regular horse killer. He wanted you to haul this one and that one, haul this one and that one. I told him when he asked me to take the team, I said, 'I'll do the load.



Ready to start cutting — Picture loaned by Susan Monk.

ing, not you.' I said, 'If that don't suit you, I'll not take them.' That was all there was said.

"The horses had to be shod. In the wintertime they had sharp toes and corks so they wouldn't slide around. Of course, in the summertime, the shoes were just square. If you pull a shoe off, you quit right there and take them to the blacksmith shop and get it put back on. There and take them to the blacksmith shop and get it put back on. Sometimes, they would over-reach or something and pull a shoe. You don't pull a horse that don't have a shoe on.

"The blacksmith also took care of all the repairs. If you broke any grabs or couplers or anything like that, he would put new links in them, weld them together, put new cant hook handles in, just anything that had to be done.

"When I worked for the Deer Creek Lumber Company, it was mostly hardwood, and they peeled it. Then in the spring after they brought the logs off, they brought the bark off. We hauled the bark on sleds down to where the railroads was and loaded it into box cars. Then they took it up to the tannery.

"I went to work for the North Fork Company. The mountain was very rough, steep, and rocky. I drove team there until July 1, 1919. One of the horses I drove was getting real hot, and if you gave him lots of water, he'd get sick. I took two or three days off, and when I went back down, why he had passed away. The boss told me to take another old horse up with the good horse. I told him no. I didn't want to take that crippled horse out, he'd just get killed. He said, 'He wasn't no good anyway.' I didn't like the idea, but I took him out Monday morning and went to the top of the mountain and got a trail made up. I think we had about twenty-eight logs, and we grabbed on the haul—it didn't move. I just unhooked 'em, drove 'em out, tied 'em up and walked back over the mountain. I met the grab driver coming down to see what the trouble was. I told him, whenever the boss comes up, I said, 'You tell him to take the team down the mountain that I didn't want to kill old Fred.' He came up, and he told him, and sure enough that is what happened.

"I didn't even go towards the camp. I came across this side and walked to Arbovale and caught the mail hack and went to Cass. I went to work at Cass Lumber Yard at noon. So, I was at Cass until 1960, the first of July, forty-one years. While I was at Cass, I was piling and grading lumber, either in the mill or out in the yard."

LOG TRAIL

"They had couplers that they put the logs together with. They had three lengths and then a swivel in the middle and three lengths the other end. Unless you had a powerful big log, they would leave at least six or eight inches (between the logs). They generally tried to leave a large log to start down the mountain. When we started off the mountain, we never brought them all the way to the landing; we'd leave them to turn them loose. When the spreaders started hitting the horse heel, you couldn't hold them ahead of the trail of logs at all. They knew to jay and let the logs go. They knew to get out of the way. When the horses jayed, the spreader hook would come unhooked from the front grab and the logs would go on. The team would be at the side. Whenever a team got used to getting out of the way, you couldn't hook them. If it didn't come unhooked, they'd take the head log right out of the woods with them. That's what they called 'jack pottin'.' The logs would just pile up all over the place, and you'd have to tear them apart. I've hauled as many as thirty logs at once. The biggest job was getting them out into the road and getting them hooked together. It wasn't hard pulling, going down.

"After the logs slid off the mountain to the landing, they generally had a place dug out to stop the logs. Then, they rolled them over the hill where the railroad was.

"Then they had loaders that would load the logs on the cars of the trains. The train cars had bunks on them, just like your trucks nowadays, that hauled the logs. That's the way the railroad cars was, and they'd be different lengths. At Cass they used solid cars thirty-two feet long. But, the ones that come up here were sixteen feet long. They cut their timber longer over there. Sometimes they would put longer logs on a car, and they'd reach back to the next car. So then, they would have to put shorter logs on the next car. That would give them a chance to get long pieces in. Then, they could cut whatever length they wanted in the mill.

"When they got to the mill, they dumped the logs into a pond. The logs would then float over and would be drawn with big chains, what's called a 'jack smith.' With it got into the mill, they'd have a ruler there and measure the size of the log; and if it was big enough to make whatever the order was, they'd made it whatever length they wanted it.

"I never saw any spruce that was too big. I have saw them make 12 x



Crane loading the log train — Loaned by Pocahontas Historical Society.

12's out of spruce. Now take hemlock, you can make a 24 x 24. It was so much larger. It came off Elk, down next to Snowshoe, what's called Slady Fork.

"The train made two trips to Bald Knob a day, one in the morning and one in the evening when they was hauling logs. If they had to go clear into Slady Fork and get the logs, they only made one trip a day. See then, they had to go to Slady Fork and bring them up to Spruce and then down to Cass. Of course, the big engines always made that long trip. They could haul thirteen cars. The little engines could only haul six. The ones that they use for the tourist trains today are the ones that could only haul six cars. They had one, Number Twelve, that was the biggest engine in the world over at Cass.

"If the trains got to pulling hard and started to slipping, then they had to put water on the tracks and sand with it. So, they had to put a longer water tank on, built it longer. That's what made it the largest engine in the world. Then, they (West Virginia Pulp and Paper Company) bought two other engines, Numbers Thirteen and Fourteen. They was long, but not as large as Number Twelve.

"They could take around twenty-five or thirty spruce trees at once. Now, if you take the hardwood that was kind of crooked, you couldn't get that many on.

"They put four stakes on each side of the train car. Then they had them fixed where they wanted them in the pond. Then they had to chop the stakes on the one side where they wanted them so when they knocked the chains loose they would break. Then they had to put four new stakes in that side of the car every time they went to the woods. The chains went across the top of the logs and the chains were just made long enough to go across the car. Then, they used a long handled hammer to unload them. Then when the logs came off, the chains still stayed hooked to the opposite side.

"Your hardwoods are not as tall as the spruce or hemlock. They are also more crooked. You take spruce and hemlock. On the average, they are pretty straight. But, you take hemlock, it gets shaky. When you chop it up into lumber and it dries, it's not solid. It's like the wind has been kicking it.

"There is poplar and cucumber. Most people puts it into what they call poplar. But, it is two different kinds of wood. It's the same color, but it is a different kind of wood. The cucumber is a harder wood than the poplar, what's called yellow poplar. Also, the hard maple is a tougher wood than the soft maple. There is two kinds of maple, too. If you was ever around wood, you could see the difference. It wouldn't take you long to learn it.

"Red oak is a much better lumber than the other kind of oak. White oak is tougher than red oak, but you hardly ever get a good tree. It has little spots on it. I don't know what causes it, something stinging it when it's growing or what. Red oak, just holds the same color all of the time, and it is much better for any kind of building purposes."

CREWS

"They had what you call timber cutting crews. They had buck swampers. They went along and looked the place over and decided where to make the roads, where they could get the most timber to these roads. That was the first men in, the swampers. Then the cutting crews cut the timber down and cut the logs up according to the orders. That is, if the trees were good enough and straight enough to make it. You've got to cut a lot of short logs to get rid of a crooked area. In

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the hardwood, they can cut lots of short stuff into lumber. Now you take that spruce and things like that, you can get a good sixteen foot in logs easily, sometimes a couple of them. We just left the limbs and tops lay. It don't take very long for them to rot. Two or three years and they won't even make firewood.

"We used a crosscut saw. It took two men to use it. They were about six foot long. They also had a man to do the notching, called fitters. He also did the measuring too. Then they had a knot bumper. He was the one who cut the limbs off, unless they were large limbs. Then they cut them with the saw. They had a saw filer to sharpen the axes and saws. They had a cook at each camp. Then they had a helper called cookee. The cooks had to get up around four o'clock in the morning to start. They did a lot of their work the night before. They would have a regular meal for breakfast. They would have potatoes, eggs, meat, and biscuits."

FIRST STARTED

"When I first went to work, I got 20 cents an hour, ten hours a day. That was \$2.00 a day. We generally started to work around 6:00 A.M. to 6:30 P.M. We stayed in camps, and they had cabins to stay in. They had them fixed so when the timber ran out and they needed to move, you could put a cable around them and take the loader that they loaded logs with and just lift them up and set them on a railroad car; then they'd take them to the next camp, and set them up. They moved them by train, when it was time to move. Barns for the horses were moved the same way.

"They were just a box, a box cabin. There wasn't much furniture. There was plenty of gray backs, bedbugs and everything else. They had the cabins fixed so that they set together. You could just go from one to another. Sometimes not many stayed at camps because a lot of people working would stay at home. It was just mainly the ones that drove team that stayed in the camps.

"There was even one fellow that drove team that went home. He had asthma awful bad. He couldn't lay down to sleep. He had to sit up to sleep. The rest of us fellows would take care of his team too.

"The first camp that I was at, the boss's wife done the cooking. It was unusual for a woman to cook in the camps. The food was good as I was used to, plenty of potatoes, beans, applesauce and everything like that. We had 'logger berries.' Prunes, you know, we called them 'log-



Lumbering camp — Picture loaned by Susan Monk.

ger berries.' Up at North Fork, nearly everybody stayed at the camp up there 'cause it was too far away from home.

"I never played cards. We weren't allowed to play poker at the camps. But on Sundays, they'd slip out in the woods and play, if the weather wasn't bad. I usually went home on the weekends, went back on Sunday evening. The ones that wanted to leave, they'd have someone to take care of the horses on Sunday for them. If the train hadn't left with their load of logs, we rode the train down, so we didn't have to walk. Sometimes, I would just as soon walk. It really was rough riding. I never knew of a train running away up at North Fork, but they did over at Cass."

SLIDING LOGS

"They slid the logs off the mountain on dirt. One place where I worked and where the logs came off the mountain, there was a run. They had to pole that run to keep it from digging so deep. They zigzagged the poles, put one log one way and the other across the other way. This was to keep the logs in the center of the poles and to



Timber crew — Picture loaned by Susan Monk.

keep from cutting the run down too deep. After they got the poles over and the water running over it, it made it easier to skid. Them horses knew right where to step all of the time crossing this. The horses would take care of themselves if you just gave them a chance. Of course, nobody was going to contrary them very much after knowing them and knowing what they was going through with.

"They used mostly Percheron and Clydesdale horses. It seemed like the Belgians were more clumsy. They had so much more hair on their legs down around their hocks, and they'd get mud, and they had more trouble with them with scratches and one thing and another like that. I don't think I ever saw any mules used except when I was little. When I was about six or seven years old, over on the Holsterman line, they had one pair of mules. Them mules knew more about skiddin' than most people do. Half of the time the man driving them didn't have a line on them. He'd hang the lines up on the hames. He'd just talk to them.

"When you took the horses in of a night after a day's work, you had to curry them, wipe the sweat off them, doctor any scratches or cuts that they got, give them plenty of bedding, and feed them."

Cass, A Lumber Town

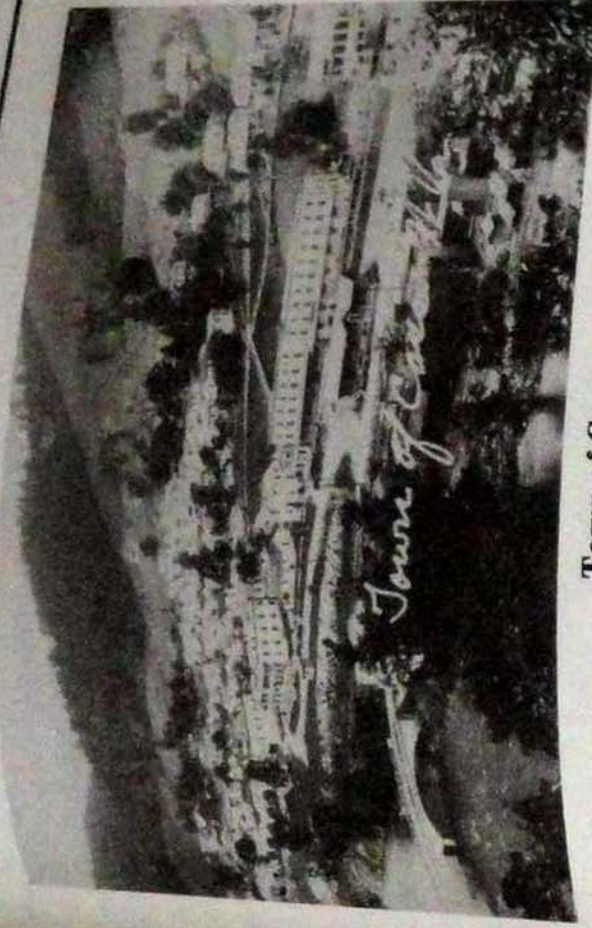
by Joan Carte

As our contacts reminisced about their days in the lumber camps and their work in the lumber mills, we asked each one about Cass, the largest lumber mill and town in West Virginia in its day. The following is a combination of their thoughts which describes the town of Cass. Cass is now owned and operated by the state of West Virginia, and one may go there and ride the old Shay engine to the top of Cheat Mountain. We hope that after reading the lumber stories, you will want to visit this historic town and spend a few hours.

"All of these houses at Cass belonged to the company. There was a church in the middle of them, and I would say the company built it too. The company owned all of the land on its side of the river. As you drive into Cass today, the houses and buildings before you cross the river were owned by local people raised there. The company didn't allow saloons on their side of the river, so they were all located on the side of the private houses. They had fights and squabbles.

"When the company was there, they kept their side pretty well policed. From the time I worked there, your time was kept on Cheat Mountain. They couldn't pay you up on Cheat, you had to come off to the office at Cass and get your money. You could take your check right into the company store, and they'd cash them. They didn't pay in scrip at Cass.

"These old men that didn't come off the mountain for months could send in to the company store and get things, and they would just



Town of Cass

charge it to them. Then when they come to get their check, they would deduct the charges (at the store) from the check they got.

"When they ran the train and the camps on the mountain, they had that big company store full of everything. The upstairs was full of beds and furniture and anything that you wanted. It was three stories tall. Anything that you wanted to buy, that store had. In below, they had 'tater' bins. I don't know how many hundreds of bushels of 'taters' they'd have down there. They furnished the mountain (sawmill camps) with all the 'taters,' meats, and stuff like that. They had meat cutters in there and everything. It was an up-to-date store for its time.

"The company owned their own operation (log camps and mill), and you take harness, grabs, cant hooks and saws; and if you are running several camps, those supplies fill up a lot of room. So, they had all three stories pretty well filled with supplies. When you needed something like that at camp, you'd just send down by the train, and they'd bring it back up.

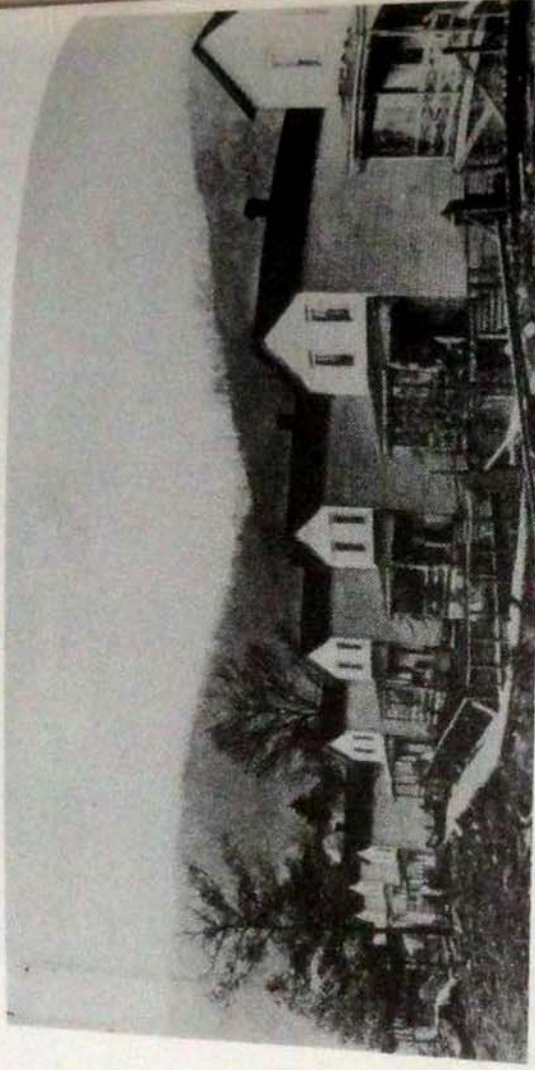
"They did have a post office in part of the downstairs of the store, but everything else was store connected.

"The old hotel was over on the corner before you crossed the bridge. They called it the White Elephant, I believe. There was four or five other places there where the timbermen would stay when they come off too. They sold whiskey and beer, and they'd get them drunk and

maybe steal half of their money before they would get away. There was different places you could buy whiskey and stay.

"They had a jail over there. I think it would only keep four or five there when they'd get drunk. I've seen 'em slap four or five in there when they'd get drunk.

"They kept a night watchman at the mill, in the store and places like that, where they needed them. They had the whole town protected well.



Front St., Cass, W. Va. — Picture loaned by Pocahontas Historical Society.

"Cass was the biggest operation around. Raywood was next to it. That was below Cass, about ten or twelve miles. That's all tore up and gone now. But, there was lots of houses there at one time, but not as many as they had at Cass. Private people bought the land up, down there.

"The company houses at Cass, where the working men lived, had a kitchen, dining room, and living room downstairs and a couple of bedrooms upstairs. They were all built about alike. Most of the men that lived in them worked in the mill or at the shops. There was some men that worked on the mountain that lived in these houses though. They stayed on the mountain during the week and come off every weekend to be with their families. The railroad crew also lived in these houses.

"After you got on up on the mountain where the store owners, supervisors, doctors and the higher-ups lived, they were big houses.

They was build well and furnished well too. They were on the road where you started up Back Mountain.

"They didn't have streets through the town. They had boardwalks. A boardwalk down in front of the houses, and then each house had a boardwalk that came out and joined the main one. Whenever a board would get bad, the company had a crew that would put in a new one, and, if needed, put in a new section of walk. They kept it up good until after the company went out.

"At Cass they also had a foundry to make broken pieces of machinery. They'd take the broken piece out and set it in sand, put it together, and make a mold in sand. Then they'd take the piece out of there very carefully, not to disturb the sand. Then they'd melt the iron and pour it in the sand to make the broken piece."

Louise Butcher, Teacher at Spruce

by Brenda Goddard and Brenda Henline

Louise Butcher started her teaching career at the mountain-top town of Spruce, West Virginia. At one time Spruce was the highest city in the United States. There were no roads up the mountain to this rich lumber area; and to get there, you had to own your own motorcar that ran on the railroad tracks or ride the Shay engine up from the town of Cass, West Virginia. Mrs. Butcher describes her first trip up the mountain and her year on the mountain as a one-room school teacher.

"The first morning that I was to report to school to work, I didn't know what I was going to ride. I knew I was going to ride a train, but I didn't know what kind of train. It was raining, and I had a raincoat. I think it was white. When I got there the engineer said, 'You can't wear that.' I said, 'Well, it's all I have.' So, Clarence took his shirt off and gave it to me.

"The train that I was going to ride was the 'Old' Shay engine that brought the logs off of the mountain. Of course, there wasn't any cars for passengers, you had to ride right up in the cab. I got in there, and there was a little box where the engineer sits. He said, "If you'd like to, you can sit down there." Well, I sat down there. By the time I got to Spruce, my hands, face and hair were black. And as I say, it was raining. That first morning when we got up to the switch-back, I thought, 'What

are they doing now?" I didn't know what a switch-back was. (The trains go so far up the mountain and level off back then reverse up the next section of the mountain. By using and then reverse method, they are able to climb the steep sections of the mountain.)

After that first morning, I learned not to sit on that box. I stood up after that. All of that stuff from the smokestack just stood up my head. That morning was the first time that I had ever fell on my head. All of the houses were black. They didn't have a teen to Spruce. All of the houses were black. They didn't have a teen to paint on them.

I think we left Cass about four o'clock in the morning, so it was about five o'clock when we arrived. I think it took about an hour to get up there. Anyway, it wasn't daylight. That was on a Monday morning. I had to go back (off the mountain) for supplies at the middle of the week. I thought, well, I'll stay until the middle of the week; and when I go for supplies, I won't go back. But, you know, when the time came to go, I was ready to go back.

When I arrived that first morning, nobody was up. They knew somebody was coming to teach, but everybody was in bed. So, the trainmaster said he would take me down to the place that always kept the teacher. Well, when we got to the house, they were all in bed. We finally got them up.

When I was at Spruce, there wasn't much there. They had a boarding house, but it wasn't running when I was there. They didn't even have a store up there. Just before that they had a store, but it and the boarding house had both closed. There was nothing there. Most of the houses were built alike. They were weather-boarded and unpainted. The houses where I stayed had three rooms downstairs, a living room, kitchen, and I guess a dining room. then, upstairs they had three bedrooms.

It was so cold in those houses. They had a stove in the kitchen and a stove in the living room. I think maybe they had a register in one of the upstairs bedrooms to let the heat up. It was so cold of a morning that ice would be frozen over the windows; I mean on the inside. When I would get up there on Monday mornings, I would just go to bed with my snow suit on to keep warm until time for school to start). After, I learned how to dress—I didn't wear a white coat after the first morning. It was really some experience.

The school was a two room building, but we just had one room

going when I was there. I taught all the grades; however, there was a few grades that no students were in. There were boys in the seventh and eighth grade that were bigger than I was.

"The houses at Spruce were in two rows. Some were off, but a main walk and then walks branched off into each house. There was a boarding house was the biggest building. All of the buildings were two story, but it was the largest building. There was the rows of houses, and then the schoolhouse was away from them. It was kind of up on the bank. At one time, it had been a nice building. It had two big rooms. So, at one time, they had a lot more students."

WEEKENDS

"I went home every weekend. So, on Monday mornings I'd drive my car over to Cass and leave my car at the mill. One of the workers there would take it back home for me. Then I'd walk up the track and wait at the water tank in the lumberyard for the train. One morning some of the men said, 'Why don't you come up here?' They had a little house (dog house) that had a stove in it where they waited. So, they said, 'Come on up where it is warm.' I didn't know how many men were in there. So, I thought, if they ask me to, I will. I went up there and walked in and all of those men were around this stove; and when I walked in, they all stopped talking and nobody said a word. So, I thought I'd better not do that again. I am putting a damper on something. So, from then on, I just waited at the water tank.

"I wasn't supposed to be riding the train. The trainmaster said something about they couldn't let anybody that was under age. He told me I could ride for a few times. Then he told the men one morning that they could take me that week — up on Monday and back on Friday, but that was the last.

"The men (on the train) were real nice and they said, 'If your daughter was teaching school up there and standing out here for a ride, wouldn't you want us to take her up?' They said, 'We are going to pick her up just as long as she is there.' Something happened; he lost his job, or I guess I couldn't have ridden. There was no way up or down, and I would have had to stay up there. If I would have had to spend a weekend up there, I would have thought I was ruined. I came

some every Friday evening.

"The snows were deep, and it was windy up there. The snows drifted, and they had to keep a path shoveled to the school for us to walk on. There wasn't any time we couldn't get to school. You know, I never missed a day up there. If I had been sick, I guess there would have been a holiday.

"I remember two first graders that I had, two little twin girls. Those little kids memorized. There was a long bench in front of the room, and you brought each class up there to have their classes. I remember these little girls were up there, and their one was reading, and it was the next one's turn. She was looking out the window, and she just took it up where the other one left off and read and didn't even look at her book. She had memorized the story.

"In the winter, everybody ice-skated on a pond up there for entertainment. They sat around and talked. There was no modern conveniences, no electricity in the houses; they had oil lamps and an outside 'john.' It sat away out and had a boardwalk to get to it also. It had big cracks in the walls. Snow would blow. It makes me shiver to think about it now. I'd freeze to death now if I had to go up there. But then I didn't think anything about it.

"A child was paid to fire the pot-bellied stove at the school. They would go earlier and have the school warm for us. Everyone went home for lunch. They all lived right there.

"Nobody came to see me. The superintendent didn't come. Nobody came but some insurance salesman one time the whole year. That was the only person that came to the school that year. I have often thought about that. A new person starting out like that, and nobody came to see what I was doing or how I was doing.

"A lot of times a motorcar would come to Cass earlier than the train on Friday afternoon, and they (school officials) told me that I could come anytime on Friday afternoon off the mountain. One time I was on one of the motorcars and it had sleeted and the tracks were covered with ice. the brakes wouldn't hold anything; we got home.

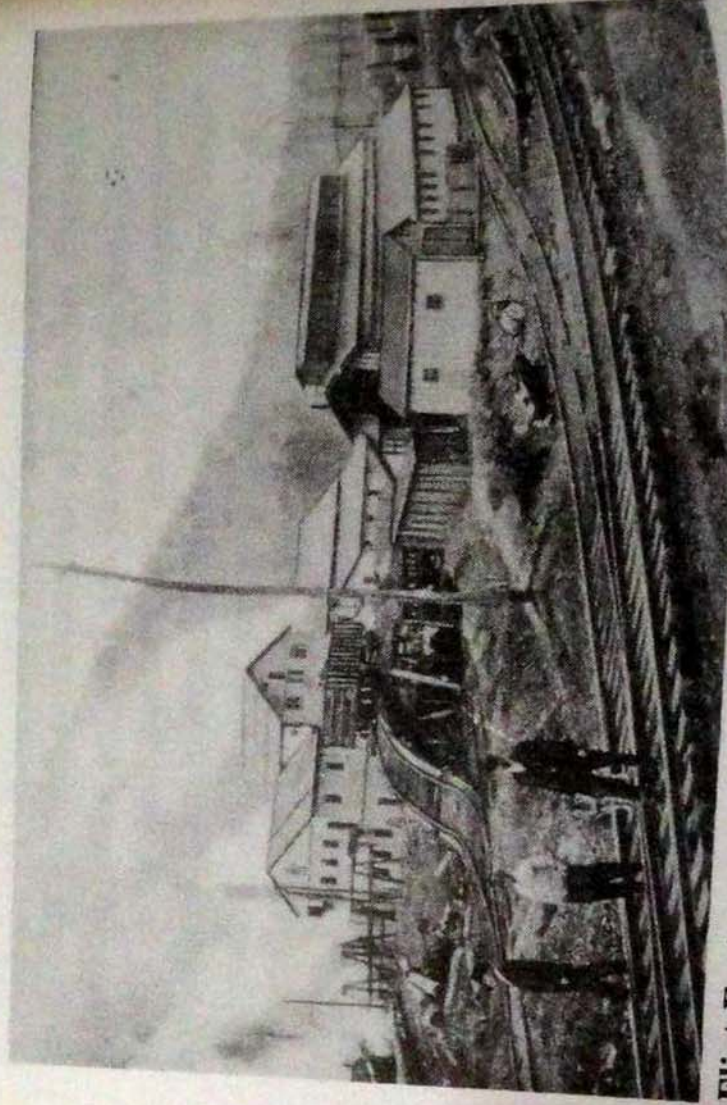
"For a long time I couldn't tell the difference between the 'Old' Shay engine and the Western Maryland train. Of course, there was a big difference. The kids could tell the difference, and they would hear the train coming, and they would tell me the Shay's coming on Friday afternoon. they knew they were going to get out of school it was two o'clock, two-thirty or no matter what time it was.

"There was always one of the parents that would walk down to the train with me and carry my suitcase. When the men would see me standing out there, they would always stop to get me.

"Those people really appreciated everything you did for me. It's really not like today. They had no store or anything, and when they needed something they had to go to Cass or Mace on a motorcar, if they had one, to get groceries or whatever they needed. A lot of them had motorcars to travel on. They would get out maybe once a week or maybe not that often. They'd bring me a list of things to buy for them when I came off the mountain on Fridays. I have bought everything from baby powder to oranges to I don't know what all. I would just pack my suitcases full with things they wanted.

"Those people weren't there for a lifetime. They were just there with the company. They were real good people. They knew they wouldn't be there forever. I just taught there for one year. The next year I came down to Cass to teach.

"They finally tore all of those houses down at Spruce. There is not a building standing up there. Today, you can go up there on the Cass Scenic Railroad. We went up there on the train, and I didn't even recognize it now. The only thing there now is some foundations. It looks completely different."



Flint Erving and Stoner Lumber Co.'s Mill — Picture loaned by Susan Monk.

Henderson Sharp

by Joan Carte and Donna Mollahan

Henderson Sharp of Frost, West Virginia, recalls life in the lumber camps at the turn of the century. He reflects on the river drives and admits that he knows no one else living who rode the river on the log drives. The last river drive went down the Greenbrier River in 1908. Our meeting with this 96 year old gentleman was delightful and rewarding. We hope that you will enjoy reminiscing with Henderson.

"I worked all up through this country in the timber industry, years ago. I drove logs down the Greenbrier River, down Knaps Creek and down Douthard's Creek and all around. I worked on Cheat Mountain for years. I worked for contractors, mainly. I worked for Mower Lumber Company at Cass. I worked for Shaffer at Cass. He was the old original lumberman of Cass. He started at Cass about 1888, I expect—getting stuff out to build the town and the mills.

"My first job in the woods was cutting roads out for the teams. It was called swampin', and that was in 1908. From that, I went to cuttin' the trees. From that, I went to skiddin'. I drove teams all over this country. I drove team from over Pendleton County to Beard on the Greenbrier River at different times. Along about 1916-17, we were logging right here (Frost) in the county for the Warn Lumber Company. I moved here in 1900. I was born across the hill about a mile and a half from here. My father sold out over there and came here. I've been here ever since.



Henderson Sharp

"I was about sixteen when I started in the timber industry. I made a hand, made a hand right out with the men. We started peeling hemlock over there in the Big Run. An old man Stauntan served an injunction on us to cut the peelin' down, around the last of July. But old man Huntly, he was the superintendent too, he was one of these bull-headed fellows, and you couldn't out do him. He went ahead and hired every man he could hire and got every shaver handled ax he could get, and we peeled that four million with axes. Finished it out with axes, finished up late in January. Of course they had been skiddin'. The teams had been skiddin' right after us all the time. We got it all to the landing down there, four million feet, right at the last of March, and there was a big snow on. "There was an awful snow that winter. It was good skiddin' and slick.

"We'd turn out on Sunday night at midnight and go until Wednesday at noon. We'd just stop to eat and go back to work. We'd go in Wednesday at noon and sleep and go back out at 6:00 a.m. Thursday to work again. We did that until that four million feet was put into the creek at the landing. When we finished, the old boss man asked for volunteers to go up to Little Shumate, they called it, and peel enough to make two million feet in the pile there on the creek. Of course, we all volunteered and took the lanterns, teams, cutting crews and all, and went up to Shumate and cut those big hemlocks that stood up in there. We cut her that night and peeled her and brought her into the creek. We got that into the creek, and there was no sign of any rain. It was still snowing. The boss said, 'Now boys, go to the camp and eat, and you are on your own until it comes a thaw to raise the creek. When the creek raises so we can pull the landing and start 'em down the creek, all of you come back.'

"I was home just about two weeks until it began to rain. The snow melted and the creek began to raise. It was all over these bottoms, and we went to work on the drive. The foreman of the job knewed where the key log was in that pile of logs to pull to let the water through. We put this old man, Adam Jones, from Pennsylvania, down in there on that log, and the team swum in there with the spreaders on and the grabs were on the spreaders. Ben Campbell from up here at Dunmore was driving the team. He was riding that old team in there to pull that log. He touched one of the horses in the ribs with one of his heels just about the time Adam hooked the grab, and it pulled him off in the water over his head. Old Adam

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horses who passed up

raised up and said, 'Jesus, Ben, what did you do that for?' Those horses would swim in there and pull that key log out.



Horses pulling logs — Picture loaned by Susan Monk

"I think we had seven teams on that drive. When a log would roll in (on the bank) where you couldn't roll it back by hand, then you (also) needed a team to pull them (back) in the water. I've seen (those horses) swim until the water was rolling over their backs. It seemed like they couldn't go, but still they was going. You had to have a good size team to do that. At that time there was good teams in this country. They used Percerons mostly, a few Clydesdales and a few Belgians. They were short-legged and heavy bodied; But the Percherons were usually long-legged and stood high in the air, heads up, and they was the best swimmers.

"We landed that (log drive) way down the river when the water fell. We had to lay off for a few days. It came another rain. We had splash dams across the creeks, and they would catch the water and hold it back. They'd hold the water up for days; then they'd open the gates, and that would turn a lot more water in. When you reached the river (and got the logs out of the creeks), there usually was no trouble. I never was on the river when they used the ark. They had arks earlier, and the men slept in each end, and they cooked

in the center of them and everything. They also had an ark for the horses to go in. They'd anchor them to a substantial tree (along the bank) that wouldn't fall in that wasn't washed out in under it, so they would be safe.

"They drove the Greenbrier River from the head of the river by at Willowburn and Mill Dam. They drove it for years. Smith and Whiting, they was the big lumber company before my time.

"There was always a lot of us on the back of the log drive rolling in — keeping the logs rolled in. We followed it right in to Marlinton.

"Never, nobody got killed on the log drives he was on, and very few got crippled. You had to have cork shoes to ride the logs. I always wore the AA Cutters (brand name). A pair of them would last you three years. They wouldn't leak. You might get in over the top of them and get your feet wet, but they wouldn't leak. The spikes in the bottom would last you about a year.

"They used everybody they could get on a drive. They fired a lot



Picture of early arks — loaned by Pocahontas Historical Society.



Early loggers — Picture loaned by Susan Monk.

of them too. I've seen 'em call them over and say, 'You're no good,' and give them their money right there.

"I made a dollar seventy-five a day, daylight until dark. There wasn't no hours to it, just daylight until dark. On the log drives the only tool you used was a cant hook. And you just watched not to get drowned. If you lost the cant hook, it was five dollars. The company furnished the first one; but if you lost it in the river, it cost you five dollars.

"On one log drive, I fell off in the river out of sight, but I held on to my cant hook. Lots of times the logs would jam up, just heaps of them, piled up high. Then you'd have to send maybe eight or ten of these catty men in to loosen them up. That would happen often here on the creek. The banks wasn't too high; and if they started jamming, they'd pile way back up the valley. So, they'd send men in that was handy with a cant hook and that could ride a log to unjam them. It is pretty hard to ride in swift water. If you don't get the right kind of log, it will go under with you. You need a log with the big end ahead and as big a log as you can get. In rough water, they are hard to handle. They always kept (john) boats along if someone fell in the river. He stayed pretty close with you. A lot of places in the river, you would have cliffs and rocks that the men couldn't get around, and they used these

boats to get the men around to the other side. Every now and then you would see five or six men going down the river on one log with their cant hooks pushing like oars. As long as the logs were going all right, you could just stand there and ride.

"If they jammed up and you could get one picked out of there for the water to run through, the water would take them out. These old fellows that drove on the river knew what logs to loosen. Experience taught you which one to take out.

"Pine, hemlocks, spruce—your softwoods are the only ones that would float. Your hardwoods, white oaks and red oaks, would not float.

"The river had to be full and out of its banks to make a good drive. When the water was decreasing was your best driving, when the water was falling. The logs wasn't floating to shore then. They was all going down the middle of the stream. You could tell when it was starting to fall. All of your logs would start to the center. When it was raising, they would float out. There was a crew to roll in and a crew to ride.

"The older drivers would ride up front to keep things from jamming. When the timbering started, it started in Pennsylvania and those old timers followed it right on down through here.

"I never went clear into Ronceverte with any drive. The length of the drive depended on the weather and the amount of water. It might be the middle of June before they got all of the logs down there to Ronceverte. They could just go as far as the raise (waters) would carry them. Then you would just camp there (or go home if you felt it would be a long enough period of time) and wait for the next one. Ordinarily back then, we had deep snows and a lot of run off (in the spring). I've drove teams when the snow was so deep it ran through the horses' collars.

"The last log drive was in 1908. That was the last drive down Knaps Creek or down the Greenbrier River. After that, they used the railroads for the logs. I was on the last drive down the Greenbrier River. There was a big rock down there in the river. It stuck up in the air high. Henry Lynch was on the boat and he said, 'Boys, if I can get you around that rock, I'll go around her; and if I can't, I'll swim.' He went around it, and he brought us ashore, and we come out down below Beard. That was the last drive. A man by the name of Sam Sheets was on that drive and

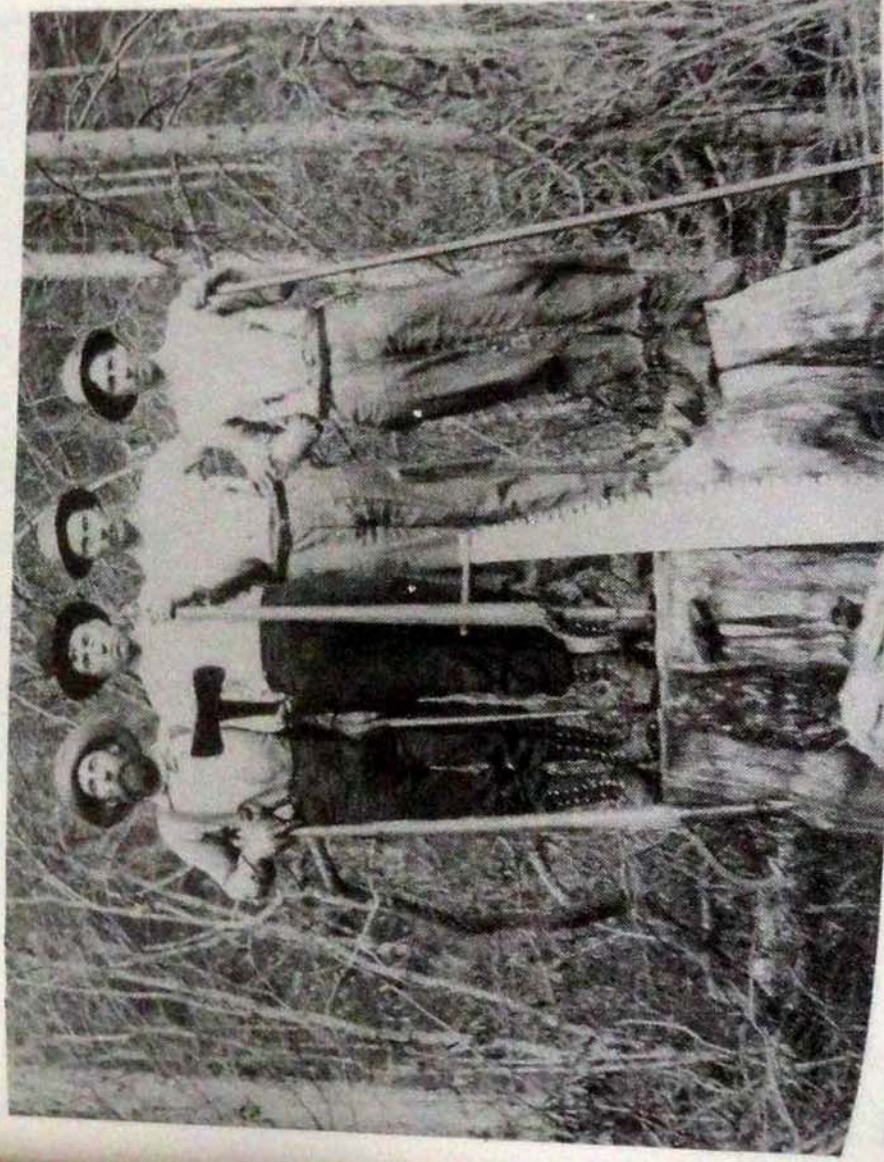
got his leg cut off when he fell down through the logs. He was always able to get around after that.

"To start the drive, they rolled the logs across the creek in tiers. They would have about twenty tiers. To build the tiers they would build slides (for logs to come off the mountain on) out of timber up the sides of the mountain. They were of hewed logs like a trough up the mountains.

"Then they would have water boys with barrels of water. They would have a certain beat (area of the slide to cover) to put the water on when it was freezing. Sometimes, there would be three beats (sometimes more). There was twenty-one teams on one job I was on, seven teams to the beat when we were sliding. We slid there for days and days, and nights and nights.

"We used trail chains, fifty or sixty feet long, on the log slides. The trail would be sometimes fifty or sixty logs. You had to use a pretty good log for the shove log because you might have a lot of little ones in there that wouldn't shove well. But, if you had a good log in the back with your trail chain, you could shove them. It was heavy, so it would push them.

"They used a jigger horse back in the woods to roll the logs into the



Early loggers — Picture loaned by Susan Monk.

landing. He would get a trail in there for the next team to take to the slide.

"Then when the logs went down the mountain, the landing men had to catch them on the fly. Then they would take the cant hooks and roll them out of the slide.

"The horses that we used in the camps belonged to the local people and they hired them to the timber people—two dollars and a half each day, and their board. This included the harness.

"There was an old Frenchman that lived down the creek here that had seven or eight teams. They was poor, my dear sir; they was poor. He brought them up to the camp. Even though they were poor, they would pull every pound they could. They was there all winter, and they got in pretty good shape by spring. They worked from daylight to dark, too. I've seen horses fall right off their feet when they would get to the barn at night; they would be so tired and dead for sleep. After awhile, they'd wake up and go to the trough and eat their oats.

"In the winter we would have to put corks and toes on our horses' shoes. The blacksmith did that. The toe would be about four inches long; and back on the heel, you would have a cork turned down, and it would be sharp. On one foot it would be sharp one way, and on the other one it would be sharp the other way. I've seen horses cork (cut) themselves awful bad with those shoes. We never had much trouble with them though. We'd just run some tar in the cut and tie them up for a few days."

CAMP JOBS

"From here, for about ten miles down, was just white pine country—big white pine. They just took the butt logs off of the trees when they cut them. They just burned the rest. They burned up millions of feet to get rid of it. Millions and millions of white pine were burned. Those trees were about six foot on the stump. There was two crews that cut 120,000 feet in one day. Each crew had two saws. They'd take one out in the morning; and about ten o'clock, they'd get another one that was sharp. At noon, they'd take another one; and at three o'clock, they'd take another one. And one day the scales said they cut 120,000 feet.

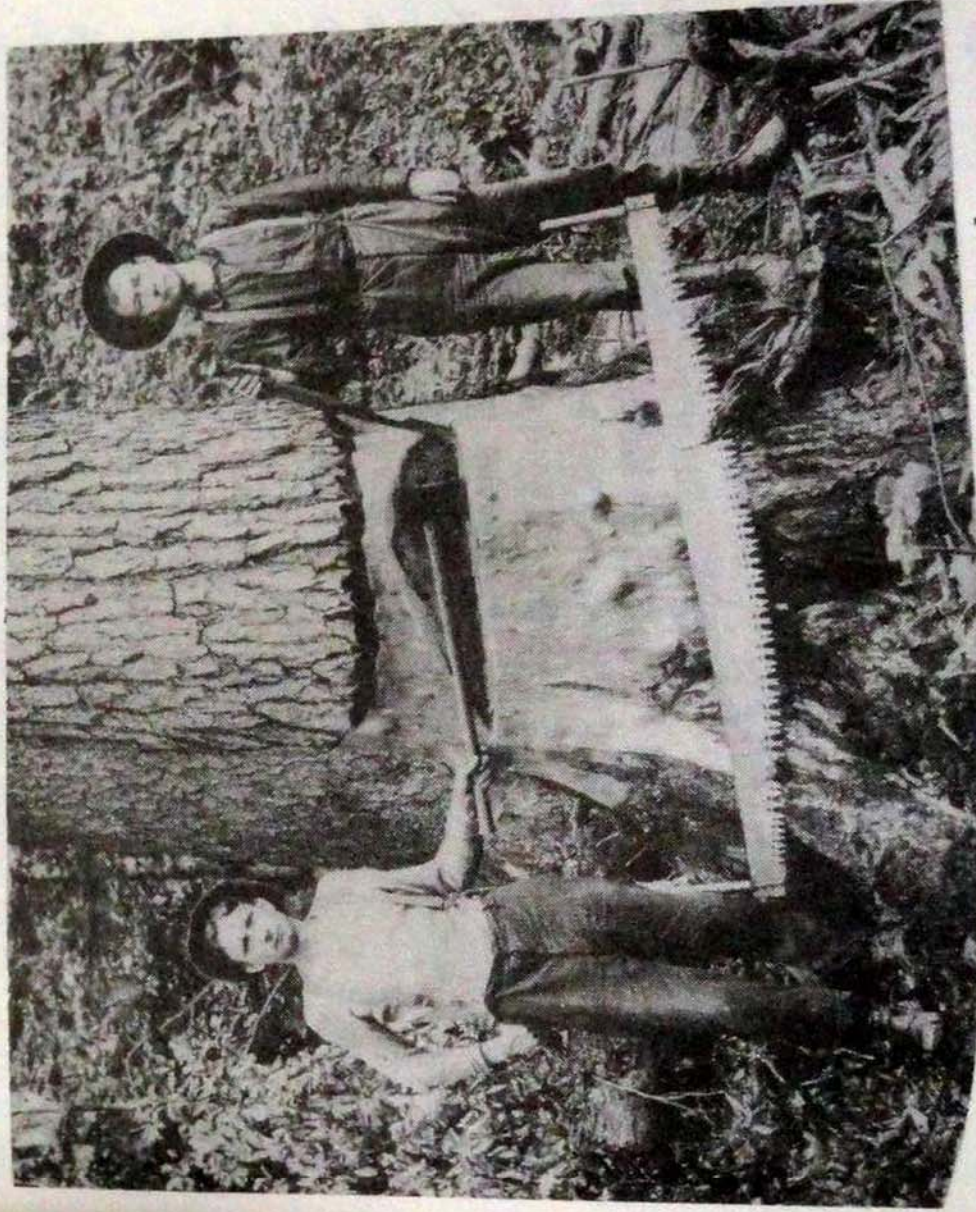
"There was a right smart of an art to sawing. You didn't want to ride the saw, and you didn't want to push it too heavy to the

other fellow. I went over to Edenwood, this side of Elkins, and went to cutting for a fellow over there. He gave me a North Carolinian for a buddy. He was big and long-legged and had long arms, and I wasn't very big. We went out, and it was big timber—the biggest I ever seen grow out of the ground. He said, 'Son, you are light. You just hold that handle and hold her steady, and I'll do the rest of her.' And he would. He'd just shove her from end to end and pull her from end to end. We cut there for days.

"You'd have a peeler after you, spuddin.' About every four feet, the ringer would put a ring around 'em. Then the spudder would come along and peel it. They never saved the bark then, just left it lay.

"They had a scaler. He would come along after you and measure the logs. We would cut 10,000-12,000 feet a day. With eight or ten crews cuttin', he had a job to keep it all measured up.

"They had a sawyer to sharpen the saws. If a saw was cuttin' good, I would keep it all day. I have carried a few of them in before noon if they wasn't cuttin' though. And I have broke a few that wouldn't cut. I would tell the sawyer, 'You can go up and get the pieces if you want



Early loggers — Picture loaned by Susan Monk.

them." I always used a Simmon saw when I would get it. Sagger was my choice for an ax.

"They had a camp doctor that lived at Raymond. Old Doctor Miller would come as he was needed. He would sometimes stop by about twice a week if he wasn't needed at the office.

"They never heard of the flu then. I never heard of a case of the flu, and very few people was sick. I remember when they took the white pine out. I was about five years old, I reckon. My mother and me was a goin' to the log camp one Sunday for dinner. We got the old horse out and rode down there. She knew several of the old hicks down there; they lived right around here. Craig Ashword that lived up here at Greenbank, he was down there, and he was pretty sick. The doctor was there, I forget which one, probably old Dr. Patter-son from Huntersville. He nearly died, and they had to take him home. They didn't have no hospitals then."

LUMBER CAMPS

"We'd walk at night three or four miles by moonlight to get back to camp and walk back in the morning before daylight to where we had left the tools. Them was good old days. It was hard work, but we had fun.

"The bell would ring about six o'clock for supper in the evening—FIVE O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING. They used a piece of railroad steel hung up in a tree, and just pound it with a hammer. I worked at one camp, and that's the way they turned you out, by the steel in the morning, back in at noon, back in the evening. You could hear the thing four or five miles.

"They fed you the best grub. They had everything you wanted: beef twice a day; pork, usually for breakfast; always, biscuits for breakfast, light bread or rolls for dinner and supper.

"The best cook I ever eat after was up at the head of the river—fellow by the name of Paul Nelson. He'd have turkey, chicken, fish, cakes and everything that you can name.

"It depended on how bad they needed logs what holidays you got off—usually, no holidays. They all took Sunday off except for one place I worked on Green Mountain; the contractor there had a big job, and he worked every Sunday. He did turn in at noon on Wednesday and let the men and horses rest.

"It was steep down over that mountain, and you just pull them

logs over so far and skip the grabs out of 'em and turn 'em loose over the hill. By spring, we had an awful pile of logs down there.

"You take old camp 7, 9, 11 and 12. Each of these camps run about 125 men. They would all sleep upstairs over the lobby in one big room. The room would be lined with beds. Some of them three deep. They just had cheap mattresses made of cotton on them. They had plenty of bed clothes. And if you was halfway decent, you could keep it clean. I've seen some of them so lousy though, you couldn't sleep for the lice. I've thrown a lot of shirts out the window, covered up with lice.

"When the old man Shaffer was in business, he numbered every camp. He didn't put names to them. When they cut out an area, they just built a new camp at the next place. Sometimes, they'd tear down the old ones if they hadn't been there too long, and take them and rebuild them. They would always send a new load of lumber up to build with though.

"They kept the train tracks laid ahead of where they were working, so they would be ready to move. They kept a bunch to work on the tracks all of the time. It was always swampy in that spruce country. You'd think you were on solid ground, and the next minute you'd be in mud up to your neck. You'd go through the turf. They had to chunk and haul rock to build railroad tracks. They'd also take small chunks of spruce and put under there. They would just build bridges over those areas. Italians built most all of the train tracks."

SNOWS

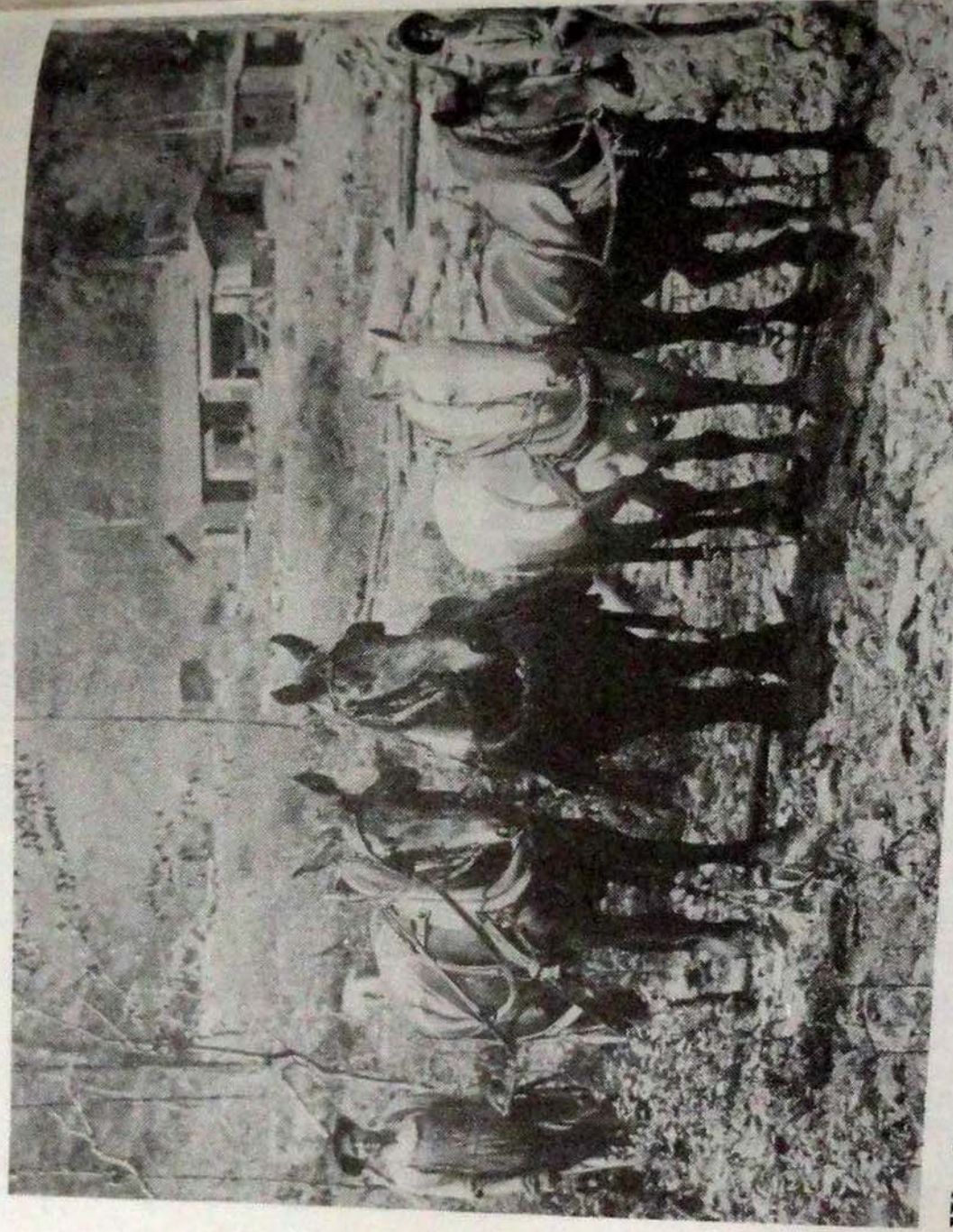
"In the winter of 1907, there was no work nowhere. Four of us went up to the lumber camps for a job. The snow was over our heads, and the floor of the lobby was just full of men looking for work, and they couldn't get work. The boss would come out and say, 'I'm sorry fellows, but I don't have a thing for any of you.' They'd light off for another camp. It would be the same thing. The lobbies were just full of men sleeping on the floor. I was lucky; I never had to sleep on the floor one night.

"You could go back up there the next year, and the stumps were higher than my head where they had cut the trees that winter. The snow was that deep. They were cutting there for the ground that winter before."

AGE LIMIT

"You could work as long as you wanted to, as long as you were able to carry an ax or a cant hook. I never did know of anybody being laid off on account of their age. The last few years, now, they wouldn't hire you if you was over fifty. In the old camps it didn't matter.

"As the business moved out, the old wood hicks moved out too. When they finished up, they went from here to yonder."



Workers and horses at lumber camp — Picture loaned by Susan Monk.

MOUNTAIN TRACE

Book II

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